

NEWS FROM ED MARKEY

United States Congress

Massachusetts Seventh District

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MARKEY, TURNER PROBE HOMELAND SECURITY DEPARTMENT DECISION TO INSPECT CARGO ON RUSSIAN FLIGHTS

*Congressmen Highlight Security Risk of Unscreened Cargo, Ask Why
Other Routes Exempt From 100% Cargo Screening Policy*

Washington, DC: In the aftermath of terrorist attacks in Russia, Rep. Edward Markey (D-MA), a senior member of the Homeland Security Committee, and Rep. Jim Turner (D-TX), the ranking Democratic member of the Homeland Security Committee, today sent a letter to Homeland Security Department Secretary Tom Ridge requesting information about the Department's recent decision to require the inspection of all the cargo loaded aboard two airlines with nonstop flights from Moscow to the United States. TSA's decision is a departure from current policy, since almost none of the cargo loaded aboard passenger planes departing from or arriving at U.S. airports is inspected for explosives or other dangerous materials, a security loophole that Rep. Markey has been working to close for more than a year.

"TSA's decision to require 100% inspection of cargo carried aboard two passenger airliners with direct flights from Moscow to the United States indicates that TSA considers such comprehensive, physical inspection of cargo a vital security measure. I agree with TSA. I also believe that 100% of the cargo carried aboard every passenger plane that departs or arrives at every U.S. airport should be physically screened to ensure that terrorists cannot exploit the dangerous cargo loophole. The risk that terrorists will capitalize on this loophole to attack our country is not merely created by two carriers operating one route from Russia to the U.S. The risk is created by the Bush Administration's refusal to support 100% cargo inspections on 100% of the passenger airlines operating in our country," Rep. Markey said.

Rep. Markey is the author of H.R. 2455, the USA Cargo Act, which would require physical inspection of all cargo carried on passenger planes. Currently, TSA uses the so-called "Known Shipper" program to determine whether cargo can be transported on passenger planes or must be carried on all-cargo planes. Because the Known Shipper program relies on paperwork checks, rather than physical screening, it fails to adequately address the risk that terrorists will bring down a passenger plane using explosives hidden in cargo. Last year, the House passed, by a margin of 278 to 146, an amendment to the FY04 Department of Homeland Security appropriations bill offered by Rep. Markey that would require 100% screening of cargo carried on passenger planes. Despite overwhelming support for the amendment, the Senate dropped the provision from the final version of the bill during the House-Senate conference, even after the House voted by a landslide margin of 347 to 74 to instruct conferees to the conference to keep the 100% cargo screening amendment in the final version of the Homeland Security Department's spending bill. In June 2004, Rep. Markey again offered his cargo screening amendment, which was narrowly defeated 191-211 as a result of stiff opposition from the airline industry and the Bush Administration.

"Cargo on passenger planes, whether it's coming from Moscow, Minneapolis, Madrid or Miami, should be screened 100% of the time. Anything less leaves passengers and crew members vulnerable to a terrorist attack that uses a bomb in the cargo bay to inflict severe damage on our country," Rep. Markey concluded.

For a copy of the letter, or other information regarding Rep. Markey's work related to the safety of the aviation industry, please see <http://www.house.gov/markey>.